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Growing Up in Hospitaller Malta (1530-1798): An Overview

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Wara li ntemm il-Koncilju ta' Trentu (1545-63), fl-1575 Ruma bagħtet f'Malta lil Monsinjur Pietro Dusina bħala Vigarju Apostoliku sabiex jirraporta dwar l-istat tal-Knisja Maltija. Malta kienet ilha kważi hamsa u erbghin sena immexxija mill-Kavallieri ta' San Ġwann. Matul dawn is-snin, il-gżejjer Maltin soffrew żewġ attakki kbar (1551, 1565) mill-Imperu Ottoman; f'dan iż-żmien ukoll Malta rat il-bidu ta' proċess ta' urbanizzazzjoni b'mod speċjali madwar il-Port il-Kbir. Dan l-iżvilupp urban kien xprunat mill-preżenza ta' l-Ordni li kellha biżżejjed riżorsi sabiex tibda u ssostni dan il-proċess. Il-preżenza ta' l-Ordni f'Malta fil-perjodu bikri modern fissret ukoll li Malta saret stat teokratiku, jiġifieri stat immexxi minn nies reliġjużi. Għaldaqstant huwa fi hdan dan il-kuntest urban u reliġjuż li t-tema prinċipali ta' dan l-artiklu, jiġifieri, l-esperjenzi ta' kif wiehed kien jgħix it-tfulija u l-adoloxxenza f'Malta fi żmien il-Kavallieri, tiżvolgi.

Dan l-artiklu jibda billi janalizza l-ideat ta' numru ta' filosofi u psikologi li matul il-milja tas-snin hallew impatt, permezz ta' hsibijiethom, fuq kif l-istoriċi – imma anke s-soċjeta ingenerali – harsu lejn il-proċessi tat-tfulija u l-adoloxxenza. Minn hemm nimxu biex nagħtu harsa lejn l-istorjografija Maltija u barranija dwar dan is-suġġett. Fl-aħħar parti, l-artiklu jitratta l-komunitajiet urbani Maltin żviluppati mill-Kavallieri u kif, fi hdan dawn il-komunitajiet, tfaċċaw u nstabu soluzzjonijiet għall-problemi soċjali bħalma kienu t-tfal abbandunati u n-nisa li ma setgħux jiżżewġu minhabba n-nuqqas ta' dota.

INTRODUCTION

Following the Council of Trent (1545-63), in 1575 Rome sent Mgr Pietro Dusina as Apostolic Visitor to Malta to report on the state of the Maltese Church. By this time, Malta had been administered by the Order of St. John the Baptist of Jerusalem, also known as the Hospitallers, for forty-five years, in which time Malta had experienced the brunt of two major attacks (1551, 1565) by the Ottoman Empire, as well as witnessed the beginnings of a process of urbanization centred around its harbours (See Map 1). The Hospitallers, who were a religious-military community, had the dynamism and resources to drive the generation and expansion of urban communities that would thoroughly transform the social, economic and cultural dynamics of Malta. The juxtaposition of religion and urbanization was a fundamental feature of Hospitaller Malta, which was a theocratic state run by religious men – the Grand Master of the Hospi-

tallers, the Bishop of Malta, and the Inquisitor – all of whom reported directly to the Pope. One way in which this intricate situation can be analysed is by looking at how religious concepts impacted on the experiences of children and adolescents growing up in the Hospitaller towns of early modern Malta, and how this was considered – or not – in the historiography.

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT GROWING UP

Beginning with the philosophers of the ancient world, and continuing with the churchmen of the middle ages and the philosophers of early modern times, down through to contemporary psychologists, the human mind has tried to come to terms with the process of growing up. Over the centuries there has been an increasing level of complexity in ideas about young people, and this emerges in the summary of a sample of eight key thinkers from different eras presented in Table 1.

Aristotle was one of the first to describe specific time periods for stages of human development. He believed that at the onset of adolescence, individuals are unstable and impatient, lacking self-control to be a mature person. Self-control is however gained by the age of twenty-one¹. Isidore of Seville adopted a framework very similar to that of Aristotle, where a distinction is made between three seven-year sub-ages within a person's lifespan². Dante Alighieri believed that adolescence really begins at the age of

	Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)	Isidore of Seville (560-636), through Vincent de Beauvais (1184/94-1264)	Dante (1265-1321)	Rousseau (1712-1778)	Freud (1856-1939)	Piaget (1896-1980)	Erikson (1902-1994)	Santrock (Adolescence, 1998)
Age								
								Pre-natal period: from conception to birth.
0-1					Oral Stage: from birth to 18 months.	Sensorimotor Stage: from birth to 2 years.	Crises of Early Infancy.	Infancy: from birth to 18 or 24 months.
1								
2					Anal Stage: from 1.5 to 3 years.		Crises of Infancy.	
3								
4	Infancy: from birth to 7 years.	Infantia: from birth to 7 years.			Phallic Stage: from 3 to 6 years. Oedipus Complex occurs.	Preoperational Stage: from 2 to 7 years.	Crises of Initiative vs. Guilt.	Early Childhood: up to 5 or 6 years.
5								
6								
7								
8								
9				Savage: from 5 to 12 years.		Concrete Operational Stage: from 7 to 11 years.		Middle and Late Childhood: from 6 to 11 years.
10	Boyhood: from 7 to puberty.	Pueritia: from 7 to 14 years.			Latency Stage: from 6 to puberty.	Formal Operational Stage: from 11 to 15 years.	Systematic Learning.	
11								
12								
13				Stage 3: from 12 to 15 years.				
14								
15								
16	Young Manhood: from puberty to age 21.		Adolescentia: from 8 to 25 years.	Stage 4: from 15 to 20 years.				Adolescence: from 10/13 years to 18/22 years.
17							Crises of Late Adolescence.	
18								
19								
20					Genital Stage: from puberty onwards.			
21		Adolescentia: from 15 to 28 years.						
22								
23								
24								
25								
26								
27								
28								

Table 1.
Age Stages According to a Sample of Eight Key Thinkers.

eight. According to Christiane Klapish-Zuber, this was because for Dante, the ‘increasing of life’ rather than referring to physical development, referred to a state of social and economic dependence characteristic of an age in which the chief virtue continued to be obedience³.

Isidore’s and Dante’s ideas – and those of later philosophers and psychologists – seem to fall squarely within the Latin Christian tradition of considering the age of seven as the age of discretion, and therefore the time from which a child is capable of mortal sin and of receiving the sacraments of Penance, the Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, and so on⁴. The Christian tradition was in turn influenced by the ideas of Aristotle, by the *Pueri paidon agoges* [On the Education of Boys] generally attributed to Plutarch and by St. John Chrysostom’s *On Vainglory and the Education of Children*⁵. Pre-Tridentine Christianity was marked by a certain fluidity with regards to age and the sacraments. This was a reflection of St. Thomas Aquinas’ belief that “Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity”⁶. The Council of Trent, in its drive to create uniformity and instill discipline, sought to regulate better the age at which sacraments could be received. Infant baptism was upheld, and Holy Communion and Confirmation, though not rigidly defined, could only be administered after a child was seven⁷. Boys under fourteen and girls under twelve could not marry⁸. Systems of novitiate for those taking religious vows were renewed or instituted, with sixteen being the minimum age to undertake one’s profession⁹. According to Oliver Logan, Tridentine decrees viewed adolescence as a perilous age, and in order for a young child not to be over-taken by a sinful inclination later on life, small defects needed to be identified and eliminated at an early stage. Such a goal was to be achieved through formation, rather than repression, as a way to create a new generation of disciplined and obedient Catholics¹⁰.

The theme of obedience was taken up in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1660). In Hobbes’s philosophy there is a natural link between the obedience that servants owe to masters, and the obedience that children owe to parents, especially to the father¹¹. Hobbes rooted his obedience argument in the teachings of St Paul. It would therefore be interesting to see, in the light of the fact that the cult of St Paul developed into a symbol of Maltese identity¹² – because the saint is reputed to have been shipwrecked in Malta in 60 A.D. – whether the Maltese elites were particularly receptive to Hobbes’s ideas.

The *Leviathan* was followed by John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). In the introduction to his work, Locke says that he is publishing this work as a response to “...so many who profess themselves at a loss how to breed their children...”¹³. Locke used observations made about Malta in the travel account of Jean Du Mont in order to illustrate his ideas about children’s clothes and the need not to overdress them so that their bodies could grow accustomed to the climate¹⁴. This in turn provides an unexpected source of information about childhood practices in Malta:

Malta is hotter than Rome, or any other place in Europe, ... The Peasants are as black as Egyptians; for they take no care to preserve themselves from the Sun; and the most scorching Heat is not able to drive 'em into their Houses, or even make 'em leave off working. This is an evident Demonstration of the Power of Nature in performing things that seem to be impossible: For there are few things which a Man may not suffer if he be accustom'd to 'em from his Infancy, as the Maltese are in this case, who inure the Bodies of their Children to Heat, by making 'em go stark naked, without Shirt, Drawers, or Cap, as soon as they are taken from their Mother's Breast, to the Age of Ten Years; so that their Skin grows as hard as Leather¹⁵.

Locke's line of thought was later followed by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Similarly to Aristotle, Rousseau believed that development in childhood and adolescence occurs in a series of stages. In *Emile* (1762) he proposed greater freedom for children and advocated letting children run about idly up to the age of twelve. This is because during the 'Savage Stage', from five to twelve years of age, sensory development takes place. Sensory experiences such as play, sports and games should be the focus of education. However, whereas for Locke fables could be used as a bait to inculcate the love of reading in children, for Rousseau, such texts led to vice, not virtue¹⁶.

These early modern philosophers were followed by an intellectual trio in the continuum represented by the psychologists Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson. Their impact on ways of thinking about young people has not only fundamentally marked the modern age, but they have also informed historical interpretations of the past. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theories, development is primarily unconscious. This contrasts with Piaget's cognitive theories that emphasize conscious thoughts. Erikson, then, in his book *Young Man Luther* (1958), integrated Freudian ideas, history and his own direct observations of young people with emotional disturbances who were his patients. Erikson's word for 'stage' is 'crises', and his 'Five Stage Child Moulding Process by Crises' is according to him the process through which Martin Luther came to realise himself and ultimately break with the Catholic Church¹⁷.

The richness of all of these theoretical frameworks means that our knowledge of young people's physiology and psychology has become much more thorough, complex, and refined. That is why, in the exposition of his ideas, John Santrock combines biological, cognitive and socio-emotional theories to present adolescence as a time of evaluation, of decision-making, of commitment, and of carving out a place in the world¹⁸.

Overall, two main trends can be discerned in these theories about children and adolescents. Firstly, there is an intimate association of sexuality with children and adolescents; secondly, there is a tendency to dissect and compartmentalize the study of childhood and adolescence into stages or steps. Sexuality is seen to be an intrinsic part of every child's and adolescent's development, be it positive (in the sense of 'normal' biological development) or negative (in the sense of physical and psychological abuse by adults on younger people). From early modern times onwards, science and medicine vied increasingly with religion to influence such ideas, allowing for further specialisation in the vocabulary of age used to describe children and adolescents.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT GROWING UP

The study of the history of childhood and adolescence – though quite ‘young’ as a field in itself – has grown enormously since the publication in France of Philippe Ariès’s *L’Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l’Ancien Régime* in 1960. The sheer amount and variety of work arising in response to Ariès spans the whole spectrum of classicists, medievalists, early modernists, modernists, art historians, anthropologists and archaeologists¹⁹. Neither these historiographical developments, nor the philosophical concepts mentioned above, have had any particular impact on Maltese historiography. According to Charles Cassar, the fundamental problem with the history of early modern Malta is that no major sustained research has been attempted; no institution or single scholar has undertaken a serious general statement based upon the extensive archival data available²⁰. Keeping with this observation, there is no single work dedicated to the history of childhood and adolescence in Malta. There are, however, references to children and adolescents in broader historical works, and in works specialising in education, health and folklore, as well as undergraduate and graduate dissertations at the University of Malta²¹.

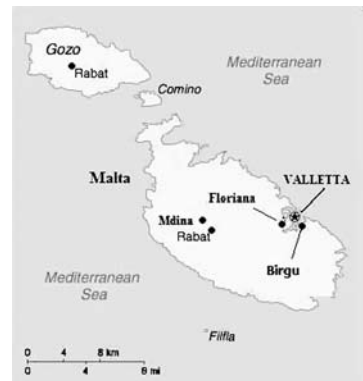
Besides these, it should be noted that throughout the British colonial period (1800-1964) and since Independence, young people were often the focus of political, religious, literary and other movements. Throughout this period, children and adolescents who entered the slowly increasing number of schools throughout Malta and Gozo found themselves at the heart of the Malta Language Question, a cultural battle for the predominance of English or Italian as the language of instruction, justice and employment²². It was against this background that Maltese as the national language started coming to the front and this was reflected in an outpouring of literature in the vernacular in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. This consisted of the writing down of legends that had been transmitted orally over the ages and the composition of a number of historical novels, many of them set in the days of the Hospitallers²³. Such works bear relevance to the present study because many of them featured children. The ‘young girl’ in particular became a metaphor for Malta – for the island was always represented as a female – and its struggle to preserve her honour and freedom against the foreign coloniser – the lascivious Knight and the evil Turk in these stories served as veiled references to British rule in Malta²⁴.

The 19th and 20th centuries also saw the medicalisation of childhood as male doctors gradually sidelined traditional pseudo-religious healers (generally female) and began writing books and tracts in Maltese aimed at the wider population. Midwives were identified as a particular category that needed to be better instructed by doctors²⁵. In more recent years, the introduction of compulsory education up to sixteen years of age, the ratification by the Maltese Parliament of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children in 1990, and the setting up of the National Commission for the Family and the Commissioner for Children, have meant the institutionalisation and secularisation of childhood and adolescence within the premise of them being repre-

sentative of innocence and vulnerability. The murder of eight-year-old Twanny Aquilina in 1960 – allegedly by his own mother – is to-date still considered as “the murder of the century”²⁶.

In the historical field itself, it is in educational and medical history – long-time favourites among Maltese historians – that childhood and adolescence are generally dealt with. Most works analysing educational developments have generally adopted an institutional and statistical approach, where the humane aspect is missing and children appear only as names and numbers²⁷. Charles Cassar and Charles Dalli, however, break away from this institutional approach. The former highlights two important points: firstly, he explores the divide between written and oral cultures; secondly, he points out the different mentalities that reigned in the harbour towns on the one hand, and in the countryside on the other, and how these impinged on the type and quality of education that were consequently available²⁸. Dalli’s work on medieval Malta distinguishes between formal institutionalised education, and the transmission of skills, techniques and values that constitute informal education. The pre-industrial household functioned as a repository of cultural values, modes of behaviour, skills and practices that were passed on across generations. This transmission took place either within the social context of the kin group or wider circle of friends and neighbours, or as part of an apprenticeship²⁹.

In 1964, Paul Cassar’s *Medical History of Malta* was published, offering the first all-encompassing approach to the history of medicine in Malta over the ages. This was preceded in 1949 by Attilio Critien’s study of foundlings under the Hospitallers³⁰. These two pioneering works remain standard texts for anyone investigating medical history. Charles Savona-Ventura has also written extensively about the medical history of Malta. His works deal with medical institutions and their management, the treatment of orphans or foundlings, and especially the midwife profession. Midwives played an important role in traditional societies and their work and activities were closely scrutinised by the Roman Catholic Church. As early as 1575, Mgr Pietro Dusina enjoined parish priests to teach midwives the proper administration of the sacrament of baptism in cases of dire need. A license from the Episcopal Curia remained a requirement to



Map 1.
The Maltese Islands.

practise midwifery until 1906³¹. Other authors have written about the Holy Infirmary and other health-related institutions in early modern Malta³².

Admittedly, unearthing source material on children and adolescents in the past is problematic. Children themselves leave few records, and artefacts designed for them, such as books and toys, have a poor survival rate³³. Literary texts, polemics, biographies, diaries, letters, advice books, paintings and historical demography were the bedrock upon which the 'parents' of childhood history – Philippe Ariès, Peter Laslett, Lloyd de Mause, Edward Shorter, Lawrence Stone, Michael Anderson and Linda Pollock – developed the classical ideas which loom over the discipline³⁴. With regards to Hospitaller Malta, biographical material of the like used by Stone and Pollock proves to be elusive, possibly due to a lack of access to the private archives of families pertaining to sectors of society generally expected to keep diaries at the time. With regards to historical demography, during the 1970s, Malta followed the lead of Great Britain, and a number of dissertations were carried out at the University of Malta, based on parochial registers, which provide a corpus of statistics, particularly for the first half of the 17th century. This work has of late been resuscitated at the same University³⁵. The work of demographers has provided crucial evidence on such factors as age at marriage, number of children born and surviving, and the spacing between one birth and the other. These provide essential contours for the history of children and adolescents, but the facts of these matters do not unreservedly speak for themselves³⁶. In the case of Hospitaller Malta it must also be noted that the amount of data extrapolated so far is limited.

URBAN COMMUNITIES

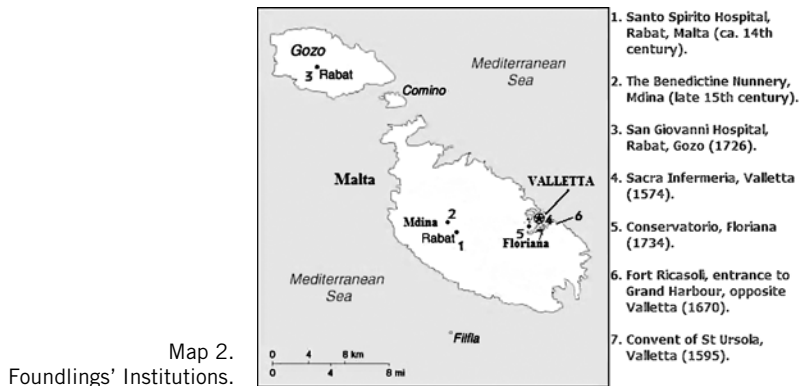
In 1575, while he was touring Valletta, Mgr Pietro Dusina remarked on the absence of children from the newly founded city³⁷. The energy and assets of the Order soon rectified this situation, and it did not take long for the empty spaces of Valletta to fill up with people of all ages, especially young ones. By 1798, Valletta and the other harbour cities were a conurbation housing about thirty-seven percent of the population of Malta, and the overall population of the islands had increased from ca. 20,000 in 1530 to ca. 100,000 by the end of our period³⁸. Children and adolescents filled the bustling streets of the harbour towns and roamed in the fields of the countryside as part of their play and recreation³⁹.

The 'street' is a key concept in the analytical framework developed by those who study the geography of childhood and stands for their concern with public space in general and the way young people relate to it⁴⁰. This paper adopts the geographers' rendering of the 'street' as a metaphor for all outdoor spaces in which children are found⁴¹. At the same time the integration between the street and the home in the early modern context needs to be reiterated. The streets under investigation were generally urban, a slant determined by the sources and reflecting the overarching impact of the urbanisation of the harbour area on people's daily lives. Some streets become what Edward Soja has termed 'thirdspace', where young people can gather to affirm their sense of difference and celebrate their feelings of belonging⁴². Examples of such thirdspaces emerge in

the sources – the square of Valletta, the staircase of a particular palace in Valletta, and the bastions of Senglea⁴³. Whereas modern geographers seek to show how on contemporary streets gendered spaces are blurred and limited, the evidence for the streets of Hospitaller Malta shows them to have been quite rigidly gendered spaces. This needs to be tied in with perceptions of the body, and questions about age, social identity, and freedom of movement⁴⁴. All these issues then need to be set against a background of a society with a generally violent and dangerous tenor of life.

Religious and ethnic conflicts in Maltese-Hospitaller urban communities could be seen in the fact that slaves were often the targets of children's teasing, as was the case of a slave wearing "a blazer and a red beret, and canvass trousers who was surrounded by boys shouting ["]This is a fugitive – let's tie him up[!]"⁴⁵. On the other hand, Patrick Brydone, who was in Malta in 1770, mentions a similar incident when he saw a group of boys disturb Turkish slaves who were worshiping in a mosque that had been built for them. The boys "were immediately sent to prison, and severely punished"⁴⁶.

Children, especially in their earlier years, tend to be associated much more with the female realm of the mother. In the harbour area of Malta, the environment tended to be particularly matriarchal as men worked at sea, while the women remained in Malta⁴⁷. For example, in a district within Valletta known as *ta' Mundu il facchju*, women sat in their doorways and worked with cotton, while children ran about playing. The close proximity of people was conducive to brawls breaking out and to many witnesses – including children – being present⁴⁸. A very vivid description of a mother, terrified at the sight of her wounded and bleeding son, emerges from a particular case from Birgu in 1590. The thirteen-year-old Josepho removed a chair from beneath a stranger who was visiting his mother Joanna and made him fall to the ground. Offended at the boy's act, the said stranger unsheathed his sword and wounded Josepho in his left arm. Joanna, holding Josepho in her arms shouted and screamed at the perpetrator "you could have killed my son[!]"⁴⁹. Hearing the screaming, the female neighbours of Joanna, as well as male passers-by came to her house. Subtle details in the narrative point to this part of Birgu as having been a centre for prostitution⁵⁰. Although religion may seem to feature but little in this incident and others that will follow below, it is important to remember



that the Inquisition and the State Magistrates were never very removed from people's minds, and these examples are all derived from such courts of law.

FOUNDLINGS IN THE COMMUNITY

Throughout early modern Europe the phenomenon of child abandonment was very common, and Hospitaller Malta was no exception⁵¹. Nonetheless, the presence of the Hospitallers lent to it a certain particularity. In their individual capacities the Hospitallers were forbidden from taking care of any children, even if they were their relatives, and the penalties for breaking this rule were quite severe⁵². Such a measure seems to have been enacted in response to a number of cases where Hospitallers were being chosen as tutors to children⁵³. Nonetheless as a community the Order was wholly dedicated to the care and welfare of children who were left to its care, as the following extract from their oath of investiture indicates:

Question: Does thou promise to favour, and to show special concern for widows, for children, for orphans, and for all afflicted and troubled persons?

Reply: With the aid of God our Lord, I swear to do so⁵⁴.

In the earliest Hospitaller communities in Jerusalem, many houses were double, containing sisters as well as brothers. These hospitaller sisters looked after children adopted by the Order, worked in the kitchen and inspected wet nurses⁵⁵. However, by the time of the arrival of the Order in Malta in 1530, and especially after the Council of Trent, the role of the sisters was reduced to that of a secluded and contemplative life, so that responsibility for the care of the foundlings was left to the brothers⁵⁶. From its earliest days in Malta, the Order took it upon itself to cater for foundlings. This it did within one of its most important institutions – the *Sacra Infermeria* [Holy Infirmary] – an all-round social institution to which people turned to in dire circumstances (Map 2 shows its location, as well as that of other similar or related institutions). In its role as caretaker of abandoned children, the Holy Infirmary became a socio-religious community, set within the wider urban community in which it was located.

While the Holy Infirmary was still in Birgu – up to 1574 – space and resources must have been somewhat limited. For this reason, when girls who were at the Holy Infirmary reached the age of three they were sent to stay with the cloistered nuns in Mdina until they reached “the age of marriage”⁵⁷. Boys were kept at the Holy Infirmary until they were six, when they were apprenticed to learn some trade or other. The Treasury of the Order met all expenses in both cases. The Chapter General of 1578 confirmed these arrangements and in respect of boys, it was stated that “they were to be apprenticed to learn a trade in accordance with their own inclinations”⁵⁸. This realization that people perform better when they are doing something that they enjoy, shows that the Hospitallers were familiar with the concept of aptitude, which was an important topic in Renaissance pedagogic thought⁵⁹. In later years, when the Holy Infirmary in Valletta was well established, a more ‘utilitarian’ philosophy in respect of the foundlings seems to have developed, in that it was recognized that these children were a potential pool of

labour that could be directed towards the needs of the Order itself. When boys reached the age of eight – later reduced to seven – they were moved to Fort Ricasoli, the great fortress at the mouth of the grand harbour, to be taken care of by the priest there, and where some form of military training was also provided⁶⁰. A Commission that had been set up by the Council of the Order on 25 April 1796 to manage the Holy Infirmary was also empowered to keep an eye on those under age boys whose services were being employed by the Congregation for the Galleys, to see that both their physical and spiritual well-being were being taken care of⁶¹. Nonetheless the arrangement whereby boys were apprenticed according to their own inclinations was maintained⁶². The options for girls also increased as at eight – later seven – years of age, they were moved to the Conservatory of the Grand Master in Floriana until they were old enough to be married off or employment sought for them in the women's hospital⁶³. The head of the women's hospital, the *Ospedaliera*, was duty bound to “instruct her pupils in those arts considered to be appropriate to their sex”⁶⁴.

Institutions similar to the Holy Infirmary in other parts of Europe are generally described with a certain feeling of doom. This is the impression which authors like Christiane Klapish-Zuber, Susan Steuer, Hugh Cunningham and Colin Heywood tend to give⁶⁵. It is an impression derived from the terribly high mortality rates that were normal at such places. The figures at the Holy Infirmary itself were quite dismal. It has been estimated that in the twelve months 1787-88, there were 212 admissions and 121 deaths⁶⁶. For those that survived, however, the Holy Infirmary seems not to have been such a bad place to be. On 14 December 1699, a certain Silvestro – who was described as an *alumnus* of the Holy Infirmary despite the fact that he was now twenty years old – was actually convalescing in the same Holy Infirmary because he was ill. His illness seems to have been serious as after he had received the final sacraments, he was drawing up his will. He nominated as his executor his master with whom he had been apprenticed by the Holy Infirmary some years before and his first wish was that the sum of ten *scudi* was to be given to Catharina – the woman who had been his wet-nurse – and her daughter Rosa, who were asked to pray for his soul⁶⁷. Though this one case cannot be taken to be representative of the experiences of other foundlings who were farmed out to wet-nurses, it does provide a glimpse of love and affection.

RELIGION, MARRIAGE AND THE COMMUNITY

Although the Council of Trent affirmed the superiority of virginity to marriage, it also took marriage away from the hands of the laity and placed it under the strict supervision of the clergy⁶⁸. One notable change in Notarial terminology with regards to marriage contracts had occurred by the 1590s. Whereas earlier marriage contracts were declared to be in accordance “with both the Greek as well as the Roman rite”, by 1590 this was being replaced by the words “according to the mores and rituals of the holy and saintly Council of Trent and according to Roman usage”⁶⁹. The concern evinced in the earlier formula was linked to an urge to guarantee the validity of a marriage in the light

of the West-East Christian schism, and is explained away by Mgr Dusina's observation in 1575 of a plurality of rites being observed in Malta – Latin, Gallican and Greek⁷⁰. The gradual introduction of this Tridentine formula over the course of the last part of the 16th century is indicative of the ways Catholic reforms were seeping down society and – at least on paper – being brought to the attention of people.

Families were very concerned with marrying off their children – especially daughters – and through dowries from both sides of the family the newly weds were assured a decent – and at times extremely rich – material base from which to set off on their life together. Age at marriage is a particularly important indicator of communal ideas and expectations about children, marriage and the family. In canon law, twelve was the minimum age of marriage for a girl, and fourteen for a boy⁷¹. The Council of Trent decided that marriages contracted by women under eighteen and men under twenty years of age without parental consent, were invalid⁷². A peculiarity of Hospitaller Malta was the common occurrence of child brides, which was in contrast to the European late marriage pattern⁷³. For example, the doctor Domenico Leonardo Muriti presented a petition to Pope Paul III to be granted permission to marry off his fourteen-year-old daughter Johanna Muriti⁷⁴. Demographical data for the parish of Porto Salvo in Valletta shows that the average age for male spouses was twenty-three, whereas that for women was seventeen to eighteen. However, beneath such averages, one then discovers girls who were getting married at the age of fourteen or even younger⁷⁵. When she was twenty-one years old, Anna Maria Bonnici recalled how her mother had wed her to a fifty-year-old man when she was still fourteen or fifteen⁷⁶.

In Hospitaller Malta, it was the dowry that tangled the threads of a woman's fate⁷⁷. The widow Petrisa Famigliomeno sold her slave Margerita for forty *scudi* to buy Tripolitanian soap which she was going to sell in order to make enough money for a dowry for her daughter Angela⁷⁸. Both private individuals and organisations within the community sought to provide funds for dowries for girls whose families could not afford to provide them with one. In his will, Domenico Mifsud left sums of money to five men to be used as dowries for their individual daughters. This he did for the love of God and for the remission of his sins⁷⁹. In preparing for his death, Domenico was reaching out to lay the foundations for five new family units on the strength of his dowries. Both the Noble Lady Margerita of Mdina and Isabella Sayd also made similar arrangements in their wills⁸⁰. The Confraternity of the Holy Rosary in the Parish of Porto Salvo, Valletta, provided Gratia Schembri with her dowry⁸¹. Every year, the Grand Master, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Great Siege of 1565, sponsored six young, poor virgins by providing them with a dowry of 50 *scudi* each⁸².

Besides the dowry, brides-to-be also received a *dodarium* from their future spouses. This custom, which was similar to the dower which English wives received, and which was also present in Roman Law, tended to consist of a sum of cash, and was a Maltese hybrid between the European *sponsalium*, or morning gift, and the Arab *mahr*, with a closer resemblance to the latter⁸³. The *dodarium* was meant as a means of sustenance or as a second dowry in case the woman was widowed.

CONCLUSION

Hospitaller Malta was a special niche where the geographical reality of a central Mediterranean archipelago, merged with the peculiar institution that was the Order of St. John, to produce a set of logistics all of its own, but at the same time mirroring developments in the rest of Europe. The presence of the Order generated structural and social peculiarities similar only to other niche places such as Papal Rome or early modern Cambridge⁸⁴. The whole period 1530-1798 was characterised by increasing urbanisation and migration – both internal and external. Population growth, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the opportunities for work with the Order – both in service and on sea – drove many towards the harbour towns. As Paul Griffiths argues, there were many different ways of growing up in early modern society, and they were affected by religion, social class, gender, labour markets, urbanisation, and the responses of the young⁸⁵.

Religion permeated every aspect of life in Hospitaller Malta and by looking specifically at children and adolescents, this paper has sought to seek out information on several levels of a society undergoing change. People lived out their lives in an environment where religion and urbanisation overlapped at every corner. The example of the foundlings serves as a case study of how a ‘community’ – the Holy Infirmary – operated within the wider community to provide solutions for a social problem – that is, child abandonment – within a religious and urban framework. Marital dowries are another example of how individual components within a community – private individuals, families, confraternities, the Grand Master – inspired by religious concepts, would take action to address the problem of a lack of dowry that precluded a marriage from taking place.

Just as the history of Malta does not make sense when taken on its own and in isolation from wider developments, so its historiography needs to be considered alongside other national historiographies. The British connection – in the form of colonialism – created a nationalist/politicised historiography in which children and adolescents feature incidentally and act as a means to an end in the search for a national identity. More recent historiography – of which this paper is a part – seeks to recapture the experiences of people in the past, and in this quest a cultural history of religious concepts is crucial.

NOTES

¹ J.W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, Boston 1998, p. 8.

² C. Klapish-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago-London 1985, pp. 95-96.

³ Id. - C. Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, London 2001, p. 2.

⁴ G. Chapman, *Catholicism of the Catholic Church*, Avon 1994, p. 295; M. Quin (ed.), *Virtue's Catholic Encyclopedia*, London 1965, p. 11.

⁵ O. Logan, *Counter-Reformation Theories of Upbringing in Italy*, in D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood*, Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp. 277-278.

⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, 72, 8, ad 2, as quoted in Chapman, *Catholicism of the Catholic Church* cit., p. 295.

- ⁷ M. Quin (ed.), *Virtue's Catholic Encyclopedia*, London 1965, p. 11; J.A. Coriden - T.J. Green - D.E. Heintschel (eds.), *The Code of the Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, London 1985, p. 638.
- ⁸ Quin, *Virtue's Catholic Encyclopedia* cit., p. 11.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*; G. Aquilina - S. Fiorini (eds.), *Documentary Sources of Maltese History: Part IV – Documents at the Vatican, No. 1, Archivio Segreto Vaticano Congregazione Vescovi e Regolari Malta: Visita Apostolica No. 51 Mgr Pietro Dusina, 1575*, Malta 2001, p. 326.
- ¹⁰ Logan, *Counter-Reformation Theories of Upbringing in Italy* cit., pp. 275-276, 283.
- ¹¹ D.G. Tannenbaum - D. Schultz, *Inventors of Ideas: An Introduction to Western Political Philosophy*, Boston and New York 1998, pp. 160-161.
- ¹² C. Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity in Early Modern Malta*, Malta 2000, pp. 209-219.
- ¹³ J. Locke, 'Some Thoughts', [1693], in J.W. Yolton - J.S. Yolton (eds.), *Some Thoughts Concerning Education with Introduction*, Oxford 2000.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ¹⁵ J. Du Mont, *A New Voyage to the Levant*, London, 1696. Although Locke quoted Du Mont, he did change a few words from this extract. Most notably he uses the word 'Gypsies' instead of the original 'Egyptians', which two words were used interchangeably at the time.
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- ¹⁸ Santrock, *Adolescence* cit., p. 7.
- ¹⁹ W. Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450-1800*, London 2001; J. Moore - E. Scott (eds.), *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology*, Leicester 1997.
- ²⁰ Cassar, *Society, Culture and Identity* cit., p. xxxv.
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- ²³ S. Grima, *Il-Kavallieri fil-Klassi tal-Letteratura Maltija*, unpublished B.Ed Dissertation, University of Malta 2003, pp. 35-36, 64-65.
- ²⁴ Two such examples are the novels *Susanna* by Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi (Malta, 1946) and *Il-Legġenda ta' Wied Speranza* as recorded by Victor Fenech, (Malta, 1983). See also Grima, *Il-Kavallieri fil-Klassi* cit.
- ²⁵ C. Savona Ventura, *L-Istorja tal-Medicina fil-Gżejjer Maltin*, Malta 1999, pp. 48-50.
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- ²⁸ C. Cassar, *Education in Hospitaller Malta*, in R. Sultana (ed.), *Yesterday's Schools: Readings in Maltese Educational History*, Malta 2001, pp. 15-29.

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- ⁴⁵ [C]athedral [A]rchives of [M]dina, Malta, [A]rchives of the [I]nquisition [M]alta., A.C., Vol. 518, ff.260rv, undated, "... in gilecco e berretta rossa, e calzoni di tela al quale in torno li ragazzi gridavano Questo e' fuggitivo - legghiamolo ...".
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- ⁴⁸ N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C. 92/04, Box 525, Doc. 112, f.5r, 7 November 1780.
- ⁴⁹ N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C. 92/04, Box 27, Doc. 5, n.p., 9 September 1590, "... *elli potte amazati a mio figlio* ...".
- ⁵⁰ N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C. 92/04, Box 27, Doc. 5, n.p., 9 September 1590. The lawyer described Joanna as "... *meritrice, cortegiana, puttana, cortegiana inhonesta, donna et puttana pubblica* ...".
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- ⁵² R.A. de Vertot, *The History of the Knights of Malta*, London 1728, Vol. II, p. 111. [N]ational [L]ibrary of [M]alta, [A]rchives of the [O]rder of [M]alta 309, f.136v, Chapter General 1776.
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- ⁵⁵ J. Riley-Smith, *Hospitallers: The History of the Order of St John*, London 1999, pp. 61-62.
- ⁵⁶ Ġ. Aquilina, *Is-Sorijiet Ġerosolomitani, il-Knisja u l-Monasteru ta' Sant'Ursola*, Valletta, Malta 2004.
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- ⁵⁸ N.L.M., A.O.M. 292, f.63r, Chapter General 1578, "... *artem doceantur secudu eorum inclinationem* ...".
- ⁵⁹ Logan, *Counter-Reformation Theories of Upbringing in Italy* cit., p. 282.
- ⁶⁰ N.L.M., A.O.M. 309, f.74v, Chapter General 1776. A.O.M. 1714, f. 34v, ca.1796.
- ⁶¹ N.L.M., A.O.M. 1714, f. 1r, ca.1796. A.O.M. 309, f.146r, Chapter General 1776. N.L.M., A.O.M. 1714, f. 38rv, ca.1796. The Congregation of the Galleys was the body responsible for the overall management of the Order of St John's fleet.
- ⁶² N.L.M., A.O.M. 309, f.74v, Chapter General 1776. N.L.M., A.O.M. 1714, f. 34v, ca.1796.
- ⁶³ N.L.M., A.O.M. 309, f.74v, Chapter General 1776.
- ⁶⁴ N.L.M., A.O.M. 1714, f. 35r, ca.1796, "... *istruire le sue alunne nelle arti proprie del loro sesso*".
- ⁶⁵ Klapish-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual* cit., pp. 104-105; Steuer, *Family Strategies in Medieval London* cit.; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood* cit., pp. 93-94; Heywood, *A History of Childhood* cit., pp. 63-68.
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- ⁷² R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 22-23.
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